WSU Libraries
Student Research Excellence Award
Application Cover Sheet

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Title of Paper/Project "War, Race, and Grapes: Origins of the 1970 WSU Strike"

Class standing Senior
Major History

Contact information for faculty member supporting this application
Faculty member's name Paul Fisher
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Name of course for which work was completed Writing About History
Department and course number History 300
When course was taken Spring 2008

If I win the Award, I agree to contribute materials to an exhibit on my research for display in the WSU Libraries. I also agree that this paper will become the property of The Libraries; winning papers will be added to the WSU Research Exchange (online research and publication repository).

Signature Lucas Burke Date 3/1/2009
WAR, RACE, AND GRAPES:
ORIGINS OF THE 1970 WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY STRIKE

Lucas Burke

History 300
Spring 2008
Early historians of the 1960s provided a narrow and limited view of the student protest movement in the United States by emphasizing national student organizations, predominately Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), as the solidifying force for activism on campuses across the United States.\(^1\) However, recent historians have deemphasized the role of SDS in the broader national student protest movement and no longer portray student activism as monolithic or unified.\(^2\) Furthermore, some historians, especially Caroline Hoefferle, have emphasized that student activism differed among universities because protests were a reaction to local issues as much as national themes.\(^3\) As a result, popular student protests, such as the demonstrations held at the University of California-Berkeley and Columbia University, cannot define the broader student movement.

Like many other overlooked university protests, the student strike at Washington State University (WSU) during the spring semester of 1970, emerged predominately from issues surrounding the university, including expansion, liberalism, and diversity on campus, but gained momentum from national movements and events. In the case of WSU, the rapid expansion of the university during the 1950s and 1960s led to the creation of a student body that was more liberal and radical than previous generations of students. More importantly, this expansion also increased the enrollment of minorities on campus, which resulted in heightened racial tensions and increased discrimination. Major national events in May 1970, including the invasion of Cambodia and student protests, compounded on the issues of liberalism and race at WSU and led students to push for internal reforms. Finally, the actions of individuals on campus, especially


\(^3\) Caroline M. Hoefferle, “A Comparative History of Student Activism in Britain and the United States” (PhD dissertation, Central Michigan University, 2000), iv.
WSU President Glenn Terrell, ultimately led to the student strike during the last month of the spring semester.

The roots of the 1970 strike extend back into the 1950s and 1960s as WSU went through a rapid expansion, both in the size of the university as well as the curriculum. In 1944, the American government passed the GI Bill of Rights, which enabled many veterans to attend college and earn an education. As a result, enrollment at Washington State College (WSC) grew dramatically in the late 1940s. According to William Stimson, a historian of student life at the university, veterans comprised more than two-thirds of the dormitory residents at WSC by 1947.4 After years of increasing enrollment and university programs, Washington State College eventually changed its name to Washington State University in September 1959.5 Although President Clement C. French was not particularly interested in the name change, George Frykman, a former history professor at WSU, noted the change was appropriate because the title of "college . . . implied the absence of graduate study" and did not represent the goals of the administration and faculty to expand and fund new programs.6 By the early 1960s, the university developed a variety of new departments and graduate study programs. For example, on May 29, 1961, the Board of Regents approved the creation of a graduate program in American Studies through a joint effort between the Department of History and the Department of English. The program, which came into effect during the 1961-1962 school year, was the first American Studies program in the Pacific Northwest to offer a doctoral degree.7 Similarly, the university initiated an Honors program in 1960, a doctoral degree for Engineering Science in 1964, and

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increased funding for the biological and physical sciences in 1967. After more than a decade of expansion, President French decided to retire in 1966, and the university eventually selected Glenn Terrell, former Dean of Faculties at the University of Illinois, as the seventh president of WSU in July 1967 (Fig. 1).

Like many other universities, the rapid expansion of WSU and the cultural nature of the 1960s led to a dramatic increase in intellectualism, liberalism, and radicalism on campus by the early 1970s. Christopher Lasch argued that the "radicalism" or liberalism campuses experienced "can best be understood as a phase of the social history of the intellectual," which resulted from "the fragmentation of industrial society and the failure of the nation to define the role of the

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8 Frykman, *Creating the People's University*, 188-190.
10 Paul Philemon Kies, March 1968, Photographs Collection, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA.
However, historians' reduction of liberalism to a mere intellectual movement is inaccurate and does not reflect the genuine idealism held by a large number of Americans in the 1960s. In particular, their idealism was reflected in the mind of John F. Kennedy, who Stimson noted had a large appeal among students at WSU. During his campaign for the presidency, Kennedy visited Washington State University on February 11, 1960 and gave a speech in the auditorium of Bryan Hall. The auditorium and the nearby Compton Union Building, where Kennedy's speech was being broadcast over an intercom, overflowed with students. In particular, students responded positively to Kennedy's ideas of emphasizing higher education, creating government programs like the Peace Corps, and reducing the threat of war.

While president, Kennedy had been reluctant to use the military to directly combat communism abroad, as demonstrated in his refusal to accept the advice of military advisors and invade Cuba during the Bay of Pigs fiasco in April 1961 and the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. Similarly, the United States had opted for a limited military involvement in Vietnam.

America's presence in Vietnam changed dramatically after President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963, and many liberal and idealistic students responded negatively to new policies. In August 1964, congress gave President Lyndon Johnson the authority to escalate the war in Vietnam after receiving inaccurate reports that North Vietnamese patrol boats had fired on the USS Maddox. Throughout the late 1960s, President Johnson implemented a national draft and dramatically increased the number of American soldiers fighting in Vietnam. Students became especially concerned over the escalating war in Vietnam. A study conducted

12 Stimson, Going to Washington State, 208.
13 Ibid., 207.
15 Ibid., 122.
among students at WSU between 1968 and 1969 found dramatic increases in the number of students who protested against US Military policies, university racial policies, and the school’s administration.\(^{16}\) Shortly after the disastrous Tet Offensive in January 1968, when North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces attacked almost every American position in South Vietnam, President Johnson announced, “I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president.”\(^{17}\) After a disastrous year, which included the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, as well as riots at the Democratic Party Convention in Chicago, the nation elected Richard Nixon as the 37th President of the United States in November 1968 after he claimed to have “a ‘secret plan’ to bring about peace with honor”\(^{18}\) in Vietnam. Like many other American universities, liberalism and radicalism increased at WSU throughout the 1960s, especially over issues of war and race, and led to the creation of numerous active student organizations.

Racism and diversity also became increasingly controversial issues at WSU during the late 1960s, and students’ frustrations ultimately contributed to the strike during the spring of 1970. Two years before the student strike, the Study Council on Student Life noted that WSU lacked minority representation, and that the university had a responsibility to improve diversity on campus, increase relevancy, communication, and understanding in courses, and establish the university’s own *de facto* desegregation.\(^{19}\) As a result, WSU began to recruit more minority students and faculty during the late 1960s. However, surveys from incoming freshman between 1966 and 1969 revealed that the percentage of Caucasian students decreased by less than one-

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., 233.

\(^{19}\) Frykman, *Creating the People’s University*, 216.
tenth of a percent over four years. In addition, Stimson noted that a survey by the Department of Sociology in 1969 revealed that almost ten percent of students “held hard-core racist attitudes.” This percentage represented the equivalent of roughly 1,300 students on a campus where less than 200 black students were enrolled. Consequently, confrontations and misunderstandings among blacks and whites became increasingly visible on campus. Ernie Thomas and Ralph Atkins, two black students who attended WSU between 1968 and 1970, provide specific examples of racial tensions and discrimination on campus.

The first of these two dramatic racial conflicts on the WSU campus developed during the early months of 1969. The incident began after an intramural basketball game between the members of the Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity and Goldsworthy Hall residents on January 9 when a fraternity member and a black residence hall student got into an altercation over a racial slur used by one of the whites. On January 15, Ernie Thomas and a dozen other Black Student Union (BSU) members entered the fraternity with guns, where Thomas stood on a table and began to make a statement to the members of the fraternity. After being told to leave, one of the black students punched the president of the fraternity. A brawl broke out and shots were fired, but no one was hit. The police charged Thomas and four other black students, including Richard Smith, Ronald Henderson, Kenny Walker, and Tyrone Daisy, with assault; however, Thomas claimed the weapons were only for protection and the men had no intention to use them. Nevertheless, the students pled guilty to the charges, and they were sentenced to serve time in prison on the weekends. However, when the men went to serve their sentences in Colfax,
Washington on February 28, seventy-five BSU members and supporters led by Eddie Leon, local president of the BSU, blocked their imprisonment and moved the men into the Methodist church. After spending the night in the church, the church minister asked the group to leave the church. According to The Daily Evergreen, "the entire group was singing and all held a clenched fist raised high" as they exited the church. Police officers ultimately arrested forty-two students, in addition to the original five, for their disobedience. The case of Ernie Thomas, as well as the other individuals involved in the brawl, demonstrated the high level of racial intolerance and misunderstandings that existed on the WSU campus during the late 1960s and continued to build into the early 1970s.

Ralph Atkins, who was arrested for inciting a riot, provides another example of racial discrimination and injustice at WSU. On March 13, 1970, less than two months before the university strike and protests, roughly 3,000 students marched through Pullman to protest the national draft and racism. The marchers also promoted a boycott of nonunion grapes to support the rights of migrant workers in the state of California. During the event, numerous demonstrators entered three of Pullman’s supermarkets and began smashing grapes. However, Ralph Atkins, a black sophomore dressed in a Black Panther uniform, was the only person arrested and charged with inciting a riot. Although Atkins participated in the destruction of property, the charges implied that he had taken a leadership role in the event, which was clearly not true according to protesters. Atkins, a member of the BSU at Washington State University, had also been one of the forty-two individuals arrested during the protest against the

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26 Ibid.
29 Stimson, Going to Washington State, 225.
imprisonment of Ernie Thomas and other BSU members in 1969. Many of the demonstrators who were present viewed the arrest as an “example of selective injustice based on race” (Fig. 2). The cases of Ernie Thomas and Ralph Atkins illustrates that racial tensions existed and were prevalent at WSU in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These events led to minor attempts to promote diversity and improve racial dialogue on campus, but ultimately created questions and concerns among minorities regarding their treatment and safety on the WSU campus.

Figure 2: A member of the BSU speaks in support of Ralph Atkins at a rally on campus near the Compton Union Building (CUB)

By 1970, a combination of the university’s rapid expansion, an increasingly liberal student body, and issues of race on the campus led to the rapid but difficult emergence of the American Minority Studies program at WSU. The 1966-1968 program catalogs for WSU does

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31 Stimson, Going to Washington State, 225.
32 Paul Philemon Kies, March 1970, Photographs Collection, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA.
not list a single course for Black Studies, Chicano Studies, or Native American Studies, and offers few courses within the field of Asian Studies. However, on May 6, 1969, the Education Policies Committee and the Black Studies Committee approved the creation of programs for American Minority Studies, including a Bachelor of Arts in Black Studies, and the development of future programs for Chicano and Native American Studies. By 1970, WSU offered thirteen courses in Black Studies, including one graduate level class. Although WSU initially struggled to recruit and maintain a faculty to support such programs, the courses were incredibly popular among students. According to Frykman, in the fall semester of 1969, six students declared Black Studies majors, and 424 students were enrolled in Black Studies courses on a campus where only 132 black students attended. By creating programs to increase racial awareness and understanding among students at WSU, President Terrell had hoped to prevent or at least reduce the number of confrontations that resulted from issues of race. However, by the end of 1969-1970 academic year, three faculty members from the Black Studies department left their positions at the university after receiving offers from other schools, which jeopardized the university’s attempts to expand the American Minority Studies programs and further strained racial tensions.

While events on the WSU campus created the foundation for the strike, international events, particularly the United States’ invasion of Cambodia, and the national events that followed, including the killing of students at Kent State and Jackson State, served as the catalyst that unleashed tensions. On April 30, 1970, President Nixon announced that American forces

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34 Frykman, Creating the People’s University, 220.
36 Frykman, Creating the People’s University, 221.
37 Glenn Terrell to Washington State University, May 22, 1970, Sibley Student Activism Collection, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA.
had crossed into Cambodia from Vietnam to eliminate North Vietnamese and Viet Cong supply routes and bases. The President’s announcement shocked students and antiwar activists across America. Terry Anderson, a veteran of the Vietnam War and professor of history at Texas A&M, states that the “invasion of Cambodia, more than any other event of the era, provoked the sixties generation out of their dorms and into the street.”\(^{38}\) Major protests erupted at universities across the United States, while President Nixon scornfully described the activists as “bums blowing up the campuses.”\(^{39}\) Local governments and university administrations throughout the United States struggled to maintain peace and stability on the nation’s campuses.

Although antiwar sentiments had clearly gained momentum among students throughout the United States, the protests and shootings at Kent State University dramatically increased the size and intensity of the antiwar movement on campuses during May 1970. Students at Kent State held a massive demonstration against President Nixon’s invasion on May 1 and made plans for another protest on May 4. However, the students’ actions prompted the mayor to declare a state of emergency and the National Guard arrived on May 3. During the protest that ensued on May 4, the National Guard confronted students and ineffectively attempted to use tear gas to disperse demonstrators. For reasons that remain unknown, the troops then fired over sixty bullets into a crowd of more than 200 students that included students who were not involved in the protest. Four students were killed, including Allison Krause, Jeffery Glen Miller, Sandra Lee Scheuer, and William Knox Schroder, and another nine were injured in the shootings.\(^{40}\) Students across the United States became outraged over both the unlawful military invasion of Cambodia and the shooting of student protesters on the campus of Kent State University.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 350.
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
On May 5, students at Washington State University joined national protests against the invasion of Cambodia when students and faculty crowded into the French Administration Building. The May 5 edition of The Daily Evergreen led with the bolded headline, “Four killed at anti-war rally,” and a large article on the Kent State shootings at the very top of the page.41 That morning, a group of almost 800 students and faculty entered the building and issued two demands to Vice Executive President Wallis Beasley, who met with the group because President Terrell had left the building earlier that day.42 First, they demanded President Terrell send a telegraph to President Nixon and denounce the decision to invade Cambodia. In addition, the protesters asked that classes be cancelled for a day to demonstrate opposition to the invasion. To ensure compliance, the group threatened a university-wide strike if the administration failed to meet both of their demands (Fig. 3).43 After a nine-hour sit-in, President Terrell returned to campus and negotiated with the demonstrators over the wording of the telegraph. Instead of denouncing the war, President Terrell stated that he would express disappointment over a lack of explanation for the Cambodian invasion. Unsatisfied, the students pushed for stronger wording and finally agreed on a statement that stated the situation had “created outrage and dismay on the part of a substantial segment of the campus.”44 Furthermore, according to Frykman, after meeting with faculty and student leaders, President Terrell decided to cancel classes for a day to provide “students an opportunity to discuss the war constructively rather than bottle up emotions and anger.”45 By meeting the demands of the activists, President Terrell temporarily avoided massive student demonstrations and disruptions on the WSU campus.

41 The Associated Press published this story, but a number of newspapers across the United States republished the article.
42 Stimson, Going to Washington State, 228.
44 Ibid.
45 Frykman, Creating the People’s University, 221.
Although President Terrell's compromise with students initially prevented widespread student protest and disobedience on campus, other schools across the United States continued to erupt in violence. In the Pacific Northwest, someone threw a firebomb at the ROTC building at Oregon State University, arsonists burned the Navy ROTC building at the University of Idaho, and more than 5,000 protesters blocked traffic across a freeway in Seattle. However, late in the evening on May 14, the most significant demonstration broke out at Jackson State College, a historically black school in Mississippi. Around midnight, white police officers fired 300 shots into a dormitory, resulting in twelve injuries and the death of two students, Phillip Lafayette Gibbs and James Earl Green. Once again, students across the nation, especially black students, were outraged over the use of firearms against unarmed student protesters. Although the
shootings at Kent State largely overshadowed the killings at Jackson State, both incidents had a significant effect on college campuses across the nation.

Although many universities did not respond directly to the student killings at Jackson State, the shootings combined the liberal antiwar movement with issues of race and diversity, and prompted a second wave of protest on the Washington State University campus. After a meeting at the Koinonia House on campus, which Stimson describes as the “unofficial headquarters for antiwar and racial protest,” several student organizations agreed to work together with blacks to respond to the events at Jackson State and WSU’s history of racial tensions. On May 18, the Black Student Union and the Chicano Student Movement (MECHA), with the support of the Radical Union, Three Forks Peace Coalition, Young Socialist Alliance, and Women’s Liberation Movement, presented President Terrell and the university with a list of eleven demands. The first two demands, a clear response to Kent State and Jackson State, demanded that the university “immediately disarm all campus police and ROTC” and “eliminate all plainclothes and undercover [FBI] agents” on campus. However, the other demands focused directly on the university’s policies regarding race and discrimination. For example, the third and seventh demands asked the university to create a Review Board of “Third World people” elected by “Third World organizations” on campus and establish a ten-day racism workshop for all university faculty, staff, and administration. Furthermore, their ninth demand required “racial balance of Third World people [at WSU] proportional in their number in the US population . . . within three years.” In 1970, blacks represented 10.5 percent of the American population, but only 120 students at WSU, less than one percent of WSU’s student body, were

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50 Stimson, Going to Washington State, 230.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
black. Likewise, Chicanos consisted of 3.5 percent of the national population in 1970; however, the university’s 12 Chicano students comprised less than one-tenth of a percent of the students at WSU. In addition, the tenth demand called for “active and energetic support for all programs” in American Minority Studies, including adequate budget support, increased faculty, and better facilities. Finally, the students demanded the removal of all “non-union grapes from campus,” which demonstrated their continued support for the rights of migrant workers.

President Terrell’s response to the demands on May 22 ultimately triggered the student strike at Washington State University in 1970. He was sympathetic to the students’ opinions, but he rejected most of the demands as either unconstructive or impossible, and in response to the remaining demands, he stated that the university was already working towards the students’ desired goals. Much of the student body reacted negatively to the president’s comments, and more than 3,000 students went on strike (Fig. 4 and 5). Students posted and distributed flyers across the campus, stating that the “university community has, thru its indifference, too long perpetrated and supported racism and oppression of Third World peoples.” Ernie Thomas, president of the BSU, challenged the university’s policies at a student rally in front of the Compton Union Building, claiming, “I cry for you people. Until you accept the fact that you are the problem, more brothers will be ripped off.” As incidents and class disruptions increased across the university and the city of Pullman, President Terrell negotiated with strike leaders and eventually settled the situation on three conditions. The President agreed to hire a new special

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55 “Racial Incidents at WSU and Pullman,” Flyers and Public Notices (May-June 1970), Sibley Student Activism Collection, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA.
57 Ibid.
58 Glenn Terrell to Washington State University, May 22, 1970, Sibley Student Activism Collection, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA.
59 Stimson, Going to Washington State, 230.
60 “STRIKE” flyer by the Strike Steering Committee, Flyers and Public Notices (May-June 1970), Sibley Student Activism Collection, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA.
assistant for minority affairs, committed to the sponsorship of racism workshops on campus for the following semester, and allowed protesters the option to take their semester grades from the beginning of the strike or take final exams.\textsuperscript{62} In addition, the Resident Instructional Staff held a meeting and approved the creation of a Chicano Studies program at WSU.\textsuperscript{63} The strike ended, graduation continued as planned and without disruption, and students returned home at the end of the semester, like many students in America, to a world of parents and family who opposed their actions and opinions.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Student strikers gather at a rally outside of Todd Hall\textsuperscript{64}}
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\textsuperscript{62} Stimson, \textit{Going to Washington State}, 231.
\textsuperscript{63} "RIS approves Chicano Studies," \textit{The Daily Evergreen}, May 29, 1970.
\textsuperscript{64} Paul Philemon Kies, May 1970, Photographs Collection, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA.
Although university protests in the 1960s and 1970s reflected common themes, most student activism resulted from localized issues. At Washington State University, issues involving policies on race, university expansion, and student liberalism were the central factors that created the basis for the strike in 1970. However, the invasion of Cambodia and the deaths on the campuses of Kent State and Jackson State in May 1970 amplified local tensions to a breaking point. Ultimately, President Terrell’s decision to compromise with students rather than accept their demands triggered the campus strike. For students at Washington State University, the actions and policies of President Terrell affected them as much as, if not more than, the decisions of the nation’s president. In addition, although Students for a Democratic Society had a presence on the WSU campus, the organization had very little influence over the student strike, which required a coalition of student groups to organize. The strike at Washington State University demonstrates that student protest movements across the United States, although not

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65 Paul Philemon Kies, May 1970, Photographs Collection, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA.
nationally unified, were influenced by national events. Furthermore, this case also reveals that popular and often overemphasized student protests, such as those at the University of California-Berkley and Columbia University, do not represent the entirety of student activism in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. As historians continue to examine the events and protests at individual universities, such as those on the campus of Washington State University in 1970, Americans will begin to develop a broader appreciation for the actions of students and their attempts to reform university policies.
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Primary Sources


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Secondary Sources


"War, Race, and Grapes: Origins of the 1970 Washington State University Strike," the project I am submitting for the Student Research Excellence Award, is an original research paper that was written in HIST 300 (Writing About History) during the spring semester of 2008. Through a synthesis of various sources, the paper argues that the Vietnam War compounded on issues of racism on the WSU campus during the late 1960s, and ultimately resulted in a strike on campus during the spring semester of 1970. This research project utilized several resources within the WSU Libraries system, including resources from MASC (Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections), institutional studies, microfilm, and a variety of library books.

The primary sources for this research project came from a variety of materials within the Washington State University Library system; however, the majority of the sources were found in collections from Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections. In particular, the paper relied on resources from the Barbara J. Sibley Student Activism Collection (1969-1973) and the Paul P. Kies Photography Collection (1950-1970). The Sibley collection contains President Glenn Terrell's written response to the demands of student strikers, a few issues of the *Daily Evergreen*, flyers that student organizations distributed on campus, and other publications and documentation from the late 1960s and early 1970s. This collection was especially useful for supplying primary documentation for this research project. Similarly, the Kies collection, which includes more than 20,000 photographs of campus events and student demonstrations over twenty years, provided all of the pictures that are included in the paper.

Although MASC provided the bulk of the research material for this project, the paper also utilized a variety of other primary sources from Holland Library, including university catalogs and institutional studies from the 1960s, as well as issues of the *Daily Evergreen* that were not included in the Sibley collection. The old catalogs and institutional studies for WSU, which are located on the second floor of Holland Library, were an important element in this research paper because the documents demonstrated rapid and significant changes in university demographics, minority studies programs, and student ideologies during the 1960s. In addition, many of the *Daily Evergreen* articles that are included in the paper came from the microfilm
collections on the first floor of Holland Library. Overall, the primary resources from Holland Library were crucial in the development of this research project.

Finally, Holland Library also provided the secondary sources for this paper, which included historical texts on 1960s American culture and Washington State University. The paper relied primarily on accounts from Terry Anderson's *The Movement and the Sixties* and Mark H. Lytle's *America's Uncivil Wars* for a broader understanding of the national events that helped shape issues in local communities and on campuses during the 1960s and 1970s. However, neither Anderson nor Lytle's books comments on student movements at WSU during this period. Fortunately, *Creating the People's University* by George Frykman and *Going to WSU* by William Stimson, which were both published around 1990 to mark the centennial anniversary of the university, each provided a wealth of information on the history of WSU for this research project.

This research project, "War, Race and Grapes," provides an interesting synthesis of sources located throughout the WSU Library system, including MASC, published university research, newspapers from microfilm, and numerous books in Holland Library. In particular, resources from MASC provided the majority of the primary source material for the paper, but other primary and secondary materials from Holland Library were also crucial during the development of the research. As a result, this original research paper focuses on the origins of the 1970 strike, including issues surrounding racism on campus and the Vietnam War. In addition, the paper places the events at WSU within a national and regional context in an attempt to develop a better understanding of the broader American student protest movement of the 1960s.